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## Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy

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### Summary

- You may be busy, but you still need physical activity to stay healthy.
- Whatever your routine, your lifestyle or your health, there are physical activities that you can do.
- You may choose planned exercise or whenever you can fit it in your day, or a mix of both.
- Check out the solutions to common excuses for not being active.



### About getting active

It's so easy to put exercise and activity to the bottom of your long to-do list. But being active is one of the most important things you can do, each day if you can, for good health.

While you may not be able to reduce time for other commitments, you might try to squeeze short bursts of activity into your busy life. Every bit helps.

You're likely to have more success at including exercise into your life if you:

- consult an **Australian registered exercise professional (AusREP)**, accredited exercise physiologist or physiotherapist for advice on exercising safely and avoiding injury
- choose activities that appeal to you
- track your progress (and feel good about your achievements!)
- learn an exercise or two you can do quickly and easily for days when you're feeling particularly time-poor
- devise a realistic exercise plan for your lifestyle and routine.

Remember, any exercise is better than none, and you can make it quick and easy if that's all the time you have. By making time for activity everyday you'll be setting yourself up for better long-term health.

## **Benefits of getting active**

Being active provides so many benefits. It can:

- improve your long-term health
- reduce your risk of heart attack
- give you more energy
- help you manage your weight
- help you improve your cholesterol
- lower your blood pressure
- make your bones and muscles stronger
- relax you and make you feel content
- improve your immunity
- help you sleep better
- improve your mood and help give you a positive outlook on life
- boost your concentration and alertness
- make you more productive at work
- reduce your risk of cognitive impairment as you age
- make you happier and healthier.

An added bonus is that being happier and healthier can save you time and money in the long run, by reducing potential medical costs and leave from work, for instance.

## **How to fit activity into your life**

Not everyone has a routine. Every day can be different. You might have a block of time on some days for exercise, but on other days it might be short and when you can fit it in. Whatever the day brings, here are some suggestions you can try.

### **Exercise in a block session**

Perhaps you prefer the idea of a half-hour or hour-long exercise session rather than exercising when you've got time. If so, you need to be organised, especially if you're working around family commitments and other activities. Consider these tips.

- Try exercising early in the morning before you get busy. If you're a morning person, set the alarm and get yourself going. If you struggle in the mornings, allow yourself to try at least two days of early exercise. You might surprise yourself if you enjoy it, and keep it up!
- Schedule your exercise session in your diary or calendar. When it's already in your diary, you're more likely to plan other things around it.
- Commit to exercise with someone else. It's much harder to cancel when you feel you're letting someone down.
- Most importantly, choose an exercise that you really enjoy. Don't swim if you prefer running, and don't choose a solitary sport if you prefer the fun and social aspects of a team sport like basketball.
- Think about the travel time involved. You can start a walk or run from anywhere, but going to the gym will take extra time.
- Do a workout at home.

### **Exercise throughout the day**

When scheduled exercise or block sessions are impossible to achieve, you can try these tips to squeeze in 5 to 30 minute blocks without messing up your day.

- Combine physical activity with something you already do, such as walking the dog, shopping or doing

household chores.

- When you unload your shopping, strengthen your arms by lifting the milk bottle a few times before you put it away.
- When you go shopping, park at the far end of the carpark and walk briskly to the shops.
- Think about whether you need the car, or whether you could walk or ride your bike instead.
- Get off the bus one or two stops earlier than usual, and walk the rest of the way.
- Instead of calling or emailing a colleague at work, walk to their workstation.
- If you're stuck at your work desk, stretch your legs out in front of you, raise your arms, roll those shoulders and try some trunk rotations.
- Organise to have standing or walking meetings instead of sitting down.
- Take the stairs whenever you can, instead of the lift or escalator.
- Multi-task:
  - While waiting in line, balance on one foot for a few seconds, then the other. Gradually build up the length of time you can balance.
  - While talking on the phone, stand up and do a few leg raises or toe stands to strengthen your legs.
  - While waiting for the kettle to boil, do a few wall push-ups or calf stretches.
  - When you brush your teeth, do 10 squats.
  - While watching television, do stretches and core exercises, or pedal a stationary bike. Or maybe try to do 20 star jumps and 20 couch push-ups.
- When walking, do it briskly and include a few hills if you can.
- Stretch to reach items in high places and squat to look at items at floor level.

Not all tips will work for everyone, so choose a few things that you know will suit your body and your routine. If you're still not sure about what to do, you could watch some [YouTube videos](#) for inspiration!

## What kind of busy are you?

### Busy parents

Juggling exercise and kids can be tricky. But you can do it with some help. Try these great ideas to get active together.

- Plan family outings and holidays that include physical activity (such as hiking, cycling or swimming).
- At the beach, go for a walk, go swimming, fly a kite, or build a sandcastle.
- Walk or cycle to school with your kids once or twice a week instead of driving them.
- If you live too far from school for your children to walk, park a 10-minute walk from school.
- Walk or cycle to a café or a friend's house for play dates.
- Play together as a family. Go for a bike ride, play hide-and-seek, start up a backyard cricket or footy game, or take a ball or frisbee to the park.
- Plan family activities that involve walking. You'll all spend plenty of time on your feet if you go to the zoo, the park, a school fair, a fun park, an art gallery or a museum.
- Get the kids involved in the garden. Together, you can dig, weed and plant.

### Busy at work

You may think your work is very sedentary, but you can change that. Try these ideas to get more active at work.

- Join a lunchtime walking or running group. No group available? Set one up!
- Depending on your building facilities, you may be able to do yoga, swim or gym workouts before or after work, or in your lunch break.
- Ask your boss if you can get a standing desk. And plan standing or walking meetings.
- Meet outside so you can walk while you talk.
- Take regular breaks from your computer. Every 30 minutes, stand up and move around.

- Walk somewhere for lunch, preferably outside.
- Rotate sitting tasks (such as emails) with standing tasks (such as photocopying or presentations).
- Stand to greet visitors or when you're on the phone (which is easier with a headset or speaker phone).
- Go and talk to colleagues at their work stations, instead of having them come to you, or talking by email or phone.
- Use the stairs instead of the lift.
- Drink more water. Going to the water cooler and bathroom will break up your sitting time.
- Move your bin away from your desk so you have to get up to use it.

Try to embrace activity. Being busy doesn't have to get in the way of good health. It might just be an excuse.

### Remember...

- Being active each day is one of the most important things you can do for your health.
- Even if you are busy, you can plan physical activity in short bursts that fit around your life.
- Getting active will be even easier if you choose something that you enjoy, and schedule it in to your calendar.

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Local gym
- Local community centre
- **Registered exercise professional** Tel. **1300 211 311**
- **Physiotherapist**
- **Podiatrist**
- **Exercise physiologist**
- **Heart Foundation Walking**

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